

BREEDING WARBLERS AROUND ATLANTA, GEORGIA

BY WM. H. LA PRADE, JR.

The writer believes that there is no locality in the South where there is a greater variety of breeding Warblers than at Atlanta. With an altitude of 1050 feet, which makes it the highest city of its size east of the Mississippi, there are found here some species normally breeding much farther north. The hill country of the South has had so few competent observers that it has been largely guess work when limits have been set for the southern breeding range of many species, and it is probable that not a few birds are found regularly hundreds of miles nearer the Gulf than is generally supposed. The writer hopes that other southern observers may contribute such data as they have bearing on this subject so that we may determine whether these are exceptional records, indicating sporadic breeding, or whether the above theory is correct.

It is safe to say that 16 warblers breed within six miles of the center of Atlanta, and some notes about each species follow:

Mniotilta varia: Black-and-white Warbler. My earliest record for spring arrival is March 21, and by April 1 it can always be found. Only a few remain to breed. Mr. W. J. Mills found a nest with four eggs six miles south of the city, and Mr. D. C. Peacock a similar set four miles north. It breeds regularly but sparingly 20 miles north, where Mr. D. V. Hembree has taken several sets.

Helminthophila swainsoni: Swainson's Warbler. Mr. Robert Windsor Smith took the first specimen, four miles to the east, May 4, 1898, and the writer took the next, April 29, 1907. In May, 1916, I discovered a male in full song on the outskirts of the city. The bird was unsuspecting, and with a dainty step, reminding one of the Oven-bird, walked to within ten feet of where I was concealed, stopping every few moments to pour out its rich and ringing song. So far as I knew, this species had been regarded as a bird of the river valleys or coastal plains, so I never suspected that it might breed at an altitude of 1050 feet. But on May 20, 1920, when in the same vicinity searching for nests of the Kentucky Warbler, I heard excited chippings, which led me to recognize a Swainson's Warbler in a tangle of vines, where I soon located the completed but empty nest. On May 27, after securing photographs of the female on nest and of the nest

and eggs in situ, I collected the nest and three eggs. It was three feet from the ground, in vines slung under a small elm, and rather roughly built of dead leaves, rootlets, and pine needles. This was in thick, damp woods, near a stream bordered by extensive thickets, in a locality like those described by Mr. Brewster and Mr. Wayne, except for the absence of canes.

Helmitheros vermivorus: Worm-eating Warbler. No nest has been found here, but a few undoubtedly breed. One pair was observed through the breeding season of 1916, and one female in slightly worn plumage was shot June 1, 1916, and is now in Emory University. Twice I have searched in vain while excited females indicated well-hidden treasures. Chapman notes exceptional breeding in North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, but I suspect that they may be found in small numbers throughout the hill country in this belt of states.

Vermivora pinus: Blue-winged Warbler. While collecting some late migrants on May 3, 1916, I shot a female Blue-wing, and on dissection was surprised to find an egg nearly ready to lay. Later in the season Mr. D. C. Peacock saw a family of young Blue-wings in care of the mother. Chapman gives northern Kentucky, Maryland, and Pennsylvania as the southern breeding limit.

Dendroica aestiva aestiva: Yellow Warbler. Having so easily located nests of this warbler in Missouri, it is hard to understand why I have not found them here. Abundant in migration, only a few found in the breeding season, around willow trees in pastures or along streams. Repeated search in trees and bushes has been in vain. More should breed here, where there are no Cowbirds to disturb.

Dendroica cerulea: Cerulean Warbler. I know of only one piece of woods where it breeds, but several pairs certainly nest there every season. High up in the sycamores and poplars the distinctive song of the Cerulean may be heard through May and June, but one needs a real rubber neck to keep an eye on these tiny singers, which look no bigger than bumble-bees in the tree tops. After the leaves fell one winter I located a nest, presumably of this species, saddled on a limb of a giant sycamore which I searched in vain the preceding May.

Dendroica dominica dominica: Yellow-throated Warbler. This is another species that has baffled local oölogists. Living in the highest pines, where they may be found from the middle of March until October, the nests are doubtless indistinguishable from

bunches of pine straw and cones, and binoculars focussed for a long time on building birds is probably the only way to locate a nest.

Dendroica vigorsi: Pine Warbler. This bird is much more abundant in winter than in summer, and local breeders are nesting before many that summer farther north leave us. While some Pine Warblers nest in high pines like the preceding species, other pairs are more lowly minded, one nest with young being only 15 feet up. The three local sets of which I have record were completed between March 15 and March 27, each nest having feathers in the lining.

Dendroica discolor: Prairie Warbler. Another early arrival. Sometimes seen during the last week in March. It frequents bushy fields, and the nest is from two to six feet from the ground. Full sets, usually four, with one set each of three and five, are complete between May 5 and May 10.

Sciurus aurocapillus: Oven-bird. One or more pairs have spent the summer five miles east of the city for several years, but no nest has been found. Mr. D. V. Hembree has taken several sets 20 miles north. Chapman states that they breed southward in the Allegheny mountains to South Carolina, but this range should be extended to include the section of Georgia north of Atlanta, as they unquestionably breed regularly in many places in this area.

Sciurus motacilla: Louisiana Water-Thrush. A regular breeder, arriving the latter part of March and nesting early enough in April to have young on the wing by the middle of May. Almost every small stream, with banks high enough to afford nesting places, has one or more pairs, but the nests are so hard to locate that I have succeeded in finding only two, one with young, and one with four eggs.

Oporornis formosus: Kentucky Warbler. Chapman notes the breeding of this species at Caesar's Head, S. C., as if it were exceptional so far south, but this is the most abundant breeding warbler around Atlanta, except the Hooded and the Chat, though nests are much harder to find than those of bush building species. I know of one large tract of woods in which I believe that 20 nesting pairs is a conservative estimate. Nests I have succeeded in finding were in rather open woods, and were located by flushing the brooding female. May 15 to May 25 is the time to expect fresh sets, and twice I have found sets of five.

Geothlypis trichas trichas: Maryland Yellow-throat. This

is another regular breeder that seems to practice more concealment than I found to be the case around St. Louis, nesting places being confined to marshy places.

Icteria virens virens: Yellow-breasted Chat. Very abundant. I have found three and four nests in a day, and in much more accessible places than those reported by Mr. Wayne and Mr. Erichsen in the Auk. Nearly all sets are of four eggs, a few having only three.

Wilsonia citrina: Hooded Warbler. One of the characteristic birds of this section, arriving the first week in April, full sets being found from May 10 to June 10. Nests are from six inches to three feet from the ground, in bushes, canes, or vines.

Setophaga ruticilla: Redstart. Chapman gives exceptional records of southern breeding at Greensboro, Ala., and Jackson, Miss. The writer believes that this species nests in many localities in the northern half of Georgia. In the past five years five nests with eggs or young have been found near the spot where the nest of Swainson's Warbler was discovered, all being in birch or elm trees, at a height of from 12 to 35 feet.

The Parula Warbler has never been found breeding here, though it breeds on the Georgia coast and probably in the mountains. The Prothonotary Warbler breeds near Augusta, but has never been seen around Atlanta. Bachman's Warbler has been recorded here once as a migrant, April 18, 1914. The late Mr. James Sanford told me of following a singing male for nearly three hours, during which time he had many good views of him through field glasses, and once was within 15 feet of him. One would not expect this species here even as a migrant, but after my experience with Swainson's Warbler I am not disposed to say that any warbler breeding in the South and appearing here in migration may not also breed. At any rate, no harm is done in entertaining the dream that even this rarest of southern warblers may some day be added to our breeding list. The Golden-winged Warbler was reported by Gearhardt as breeding in northwest Georgia, as recorded in Baird, Brewer, and Ridgeway, but some doubt seems to attach to his records. The Black-throated Green, the Blackburnian, and Cairn's Warblers are supposed to breed in the mountains of North Georgia, but we can scarcely hope to add them to our Atlanta list.